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JESUS CHRIST AND RICH MEN

By
CHARLES STELZLE

Department of Church and Labor, the Board of
Home Missions of the Presbyterian Church in the
U. S. A. :: :: 153 La Salle Street, Chicago

Jesus Christ and Rich Men.

Sometimes workingmen insist that if rich men were to carry out the commands of Jesus Christ they would give away all their wealth, because Jesus commanded the rich young ruler to do so. And because they do not give away all their wealth some workingmen declare that these rich men are not Christians. They forget the circumstances under which this command was given. Jesus saw that the riches of this young ruler stood between him and the thing he seemed to desire, "The gift of eternal life."

Jesus Christ, so far as we know, never gave this command to any other man, neither are we told anywhere in Scripture that rich men must give away their all in order to become Christians. Those who make these criticisms forget that some of the richest men in Bible history were considered the best men. Abraham was one of the wealthiest men in the world, and yet we are told in several places in the Bible that he was the "Friend of God."

It is true that riches frequently stand between a man and Jesus Christ. For this reason Jesus gave that unusual picture:

"It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the Kingdom of God."

Of course, Jesus Christ did not refer to the eye of a sewing needle. In those days most of the cities were enclosed by a wall in which was a large gate open during the day. At night this gate was closed. Anyone coming into the city after sunset was compelled to enter through a small gate which would barely admit a camel. Indeed, that it might enter, the merchandise and other trappings had to be removed from the camel's back. Frequently it became necessary to tie about the camel's neck a rope which was pulled vigorously by a man inside the gate, while outside the driver of the camel belabored the beast with a club in order to get it through. Finally, after considerable grunting and strong opposition, the camel would squeeze its clumsy body through this opening, known as the "needle's eye." This is the picture that Jesus Christ intended to impress upon the minds of his hearers. They were quite familiar with it. What Jesus Christ meant was—there is great danger that riches will prove to the rich man just such a hindrance as the merchandise on the back of the camel.

However, other things besides riches keep men out of the Kingdom of God. They need not be mentioned, for every one at all familiar with the Bible and with human nature knows them. But that rich men are not Christian men simply because they are rich is an erro-

neous idea. The Church does not defend the rich man as such, still less does it champion the cause of the rich man who is a rascal and who abuses those in his employ. Jesus Christ had nothing but words of condemnation for such. If he has come into the Church it is because of the good company he will get into. But such men are not the Church—they are the parasites in the Church. They might better be out of it so far as the good they do is concerned.

The Church which many a workingman has been scorning is not the Church of the rich rascal. It is the Church of his Godly mother; it is the Church of that man of God who sympathizes with the poor and suffering; it is the Church that has taken that man out of the gutter and placed him upon his feet; it is the Church that offers Jesus Christ as the Saviour from all sin—the sin of the rich man as well as that of the workingman.

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